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A/NIO/W 18 Mar 81

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MEMORANDUM FOR: NIO for Warning

SUBJECT : Poland—Warning Update: Soviet Deception and Disinformation?

1. In examining the possible warning implications of recent events, it would be prudent to apply the test of possible deception, particularly to Soviet "assurances" about SOYUZ-81. The New York Times today carries a front page article with the caption "US Again Expresses Less Concern that Russians May Invade Poland." In response to an expression of concern by the US Embassy, the Soviets are said to have told Charge Matlock that the US was being "alarmist" and assured him that SOYUZ-81 would largely involve "command and control" without the need for large numbers of troops. The Soviets also offered the soothing assurance that the exercise would not be of such magnitude as to require advance notification under the Helsinki Accords. The Times also reported that, in addition to Soviet assurances, US officials said that American, British, and West German intelligence have concluded on the evidence available that the maneuvers would not be threatening, and that "this calmed concern here."

2. I will not review the evidence pointing to an imminent crackdown on Solidarity and Polish dissidents set forth in my four memos since 2 March, but I would emphasize that this evidence supports neither the complacent tone of yesterday's State Department press briefing nor the alleged "conclusions" of US, UK, and FRG intelligence. I would also again call your attention to what strikes me as a strong possibility that the Soviet leaders' frustration and anxiety over the drift in Poland, together with their anger over what they interpreted as Kania's preemption of the Polish hardliners in early February and his repeated failure to implement his pledge to crack down, have made them vulnerable to dangerous miscalculations and underestimates of the hazards inherent in pushing the Polish regime into a confrontation with Solidarity. The significance of this anxiety and an alarmist state of mind in Moscow is best illustrated by Brezhnev's apparent "cave-in" to

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to Soviet hardliners, after having resisted their pressures for six months. It

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25X1 [REDACTED] Brezhnev's conversion to the hardliners' prescription seems to me the crucial element in the pattern of events since late January, particularly his speech to the Soviet Party Congress and the outcome of the Soviet leaders' showdown talks with Kania and Jaruzelski on 4 March.

3. My central thesis is that the Soviet leadership, after months of temporizing and internal disagreement, finally reached a consensus between late January and mid-February that if trends in Poland were not soon checked and reversed, the Polish party's feeble authority, the country's socialist system, and its alliance commitments would be in dire jeopardy within a very few months, and that this dangerous situation could then be salvaged only by a major Soviet military intervention. To forestall the ultimate and incalculable risks of such an intervention, the Soviets succeeded in extracting a commitment to crack down from the reluctant and fearful Polish leaders, almost certainly by persuading them that if they did not act quickly, the Soviet Union and other fraternal allies were prepared to intervene. (My guess is that, at least on Brezhnev's part, this ultimatum was another bluff, but it was delivered in such a fashion that Kania and Jaruzelski had no choice but to accept it as entirely credible. The Brezhnev faction's dilemma, of course, is that even if they were bluffing, they have now handed their hardliners a powerful weapon that will make it much more difficult, if not impossible, to resist pressures for intervention in the coming weeks if the "point of no return" in Poland is perceived to be approaching).

25X1 4. The second crucial element in the present equation is the "cave-in" by Kania and Jaruzelski in the face of the Soviet "ultimatum." They would not have agreed to

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move against Solidarity and the dissidents if they had not been convinced that this was the only way to forestall Soviet intervention. Their overriding anxiety to avert such a disaster for Poland, however, has led them to delude themselves that they will be able to take what they regard as limited actions to "neutralize" dissident leaders in order to placate the Soviets without precipitating a dangerous and possibly uncontrollable confrontation with Solidarity. It is this self-delusion induced by overwhelming Soviet pressure that has encouraged the Poles to believe that the "truly representative" leaders of Solidarity will "accept" legal action against the dissidents without serious protest. The Polish leaders, moreover, have persuaded themselves that their security authorities will be able to "deal quickly and effectively" with any disorders that may develop. This combination of Soviet alarm and Polish self-delusion contains the ingredients of a monumental miscalculation.

5. As in late January and early February, Solidarity and Church leaders again sense that a dangerous turn of events is imminent. Polish bishops on 13 March issued another appeal for moderation and calm. They urged Solidarity to maintain discipline and prudence in the face of provocation, warned that Poland should not become a land of "political prisoners," and disavowed any intention by the Church to become involved in political activity. Walesa's deep concern that another crunch is at hand was evident in his dramatic speech on 16 March to a rally at Radom: "We must put a stop to (strikes). We must not annihilate ourselves. We have got a reasonable government...that will sit down at the table and cooperate with us." Walesa clearly sees the trap being prepared for him, but he knows he lacks the authority over union militants to thwart the regime.

6. The possibility of deception, in my view, centers on both concealment of the magnitude of SOYUZ-81 and the role the exercise may play as a cover and support for a Polish crackdown. If SOYUZ-81 appears to end on schedule on 25 March, or

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if the Warsaw Pact governments announce its conclusion, this will not necessarily  
signal removal of the threat.

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18 March 1981  
SUBJECT: Poland--Warning Update: Soviet Deception and Disinformation?

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